

CITY OF BELLEVUE
DOWNTOWN LIVABILITY
CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

June 19, 2013
6:30 p.m.

Bellevue City Hall
Room 1E-112

MEMBERS PRESENT: Aaron Laing, Ernie Simas, co-chairs; Patrick Bannon, Michael Chaplin, Mark D'Amato, Hal Ferris, Gary Guenther, Brad Helland, Trudi Jackson, Loretta Lopez, Lee Maxwell, Erin Powell, Jan Stout, David Sutherland

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ming Zhang

OTHERS PRESENT: Dan Stroh, Emil King, Patti Wilma, Department of Planning and Community Development; John Owen, Bob Bengford, Makers Architecture & Urban Design

RECORDING SECRETARY: Gerry Lindsay

1. CALL TO ORDER, APPROVAL OF AGENDA and APPROVAL OF MAY 15, 2013 MINUTES

Co-chair Simas called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m.

A motion to add a second opportunity for public comment after Item 7 and to approve the agenda as amended was made by Co-chair Laing. The motion was seconded by Mr. Bannon and it carried unanimously.

A motion to approve the May 15 meeting minutes with one typo correction was made by Mr. Bannon. The motion was seconded by Mr. Guenther and it carried unanimously.

2. INTRODUCTIONS

The Citizen Advisory Committee members introduced themselves.

3. PUBLIC COMMENT

Co-chair Simas reminded everyone present that the work of the CAC is to update and revise standards that already exist. He noted that the group had not been tasked with starting from scratch or with creating an entirely new system or structure.

Ms. Renay Bennett said she found out about the meeting late in the day and had only a short time to look through the voluminous documents online. She said she would be interested to hear what the CAC has to say about the downtown properties that are

bisected by zoning lines. She noted that the minutes of the May 15 CAC meeting reference the wedding cake approach to height in the Downtown, but only the north and west sides were referenced in the public comments. The south side should have been referenced as well where residents are concerned about any changes that may occur in the Downtown. The wedding cake zoning promise that was made in 1981 was hard and fast and was never supposed to be changed. She pointed out that one of the notes from staff indicated a desire to increase pedestrian activity and permeability, but she stated that as president of the Bellecrest Community Association her constituents are constantly talking about crime and traffic; they do not want more permeability.

Mr. Warren Koons spoke on behalf of the Bellevue Downtown Association Land Use and Livability Committee. He shared with the CAC a list of priorities for the project scope elements. The BDA does not believe there are unimportant work elements, but some should be given higher priority. The CAC was urged not to be deterred by the consideration that a Downtown-wide Environmental Impact Statement may be required by the changes contemplated; the CAC should propose all changes it thinks are appropriate. The BDA's highest priorities are the amenity incentive system, building form and height, Downtown parking, the vision for the DT-OLB district between 112th Avenue NE and I-405, and the Land Use Code interface with the Downtown Transportation Plan update.

Mr. Bruce Nurse, vice president of Kemper Development Company, said the company has a great degree of interest in the work of the CAC. He said his company is interested in seeing pedestrians and vehicles separated, which is why skybridges have been created. One tunnel has been constructed under NE 8th Street which facilitates getting cars back and forth and balances the parking loads at different times without using City streets. The company proposes for the future at least one if not two additional skybridges and at least one if not two more tunnels. The City should enter into a feasibility study for two big ideas, both of which have been around for quite some time. The first involves covering or capping major intersections so they join superblocks for pedestrians, and the second involves creating a subsurface arterial on NE 6th Street underneath the Pedestrian Corridor, with a portal at the base of NE 6th Street and 112th Avenue NE going all the way to Bellevue Way. With a two-level configuration transit, carpools and vanpools could enter directly from the NE 6th Street exit on I-405 and access parking garages without using surface streets.

Ms. Kelly Rider, Policy Director for the Housing Development Consortium of King County, explained that the organization is a non-profit membership organization that represents more than a hundred businesses and non-profit organizations and public partners that are working to build affordable housing across King County. The organization is dedicated to the vision that all people should live with dignity in health and affordable homes in a community of opportunity. The Downtown Livability Initiative provides a unique opportunity to explore what policies are necessary to ensure that Downtown Bellevue will be a diverse, inclusive and affordable community, but there is much work to be done. Currently there are housing options in the Downtown that are far out of reach for the baristas and others who work in the Downtown but who earn

minimum wage, for the young people who are looking to return to their hometown, to the older adults on social security, and to many others. The people who work in the Downtown should have the opportunity to live in the Downtown, but without strong policies for affordable housing, any housing built in the Downtown will likely continue to be unaffordable to the vast segment of the workforce. The Comprehensive Plan provides guidance to address the need; it indicates that providing regulatory and economic incentives can encourage the private sector to build affordable housing. Various policies have been adopted to promote the use of such incentives and to promote a diverse housing stock in the downtown. Unfortunately, the Land Use Code audit seems to disregard the City's commitment. The policies should be recognized in the Land Use Code audit, and the CAC should implement the policies by supporting incentives in the Downtown that can create a diverse array of housing options. The CAC should seek advice from A Regional Coalition for Housing (ARCH), an organization that has the expertise to comment on appropriate policy language and housing needs. It should be possible for working people in Bellevue to afford housing and still have enough money left over for basic necessities.

Mr. Brian Brand with Baylis Architects spoke representing the Bellevue Downtown Association as a member of the Land Use and Livability Committee. The 2012 Bellevue Downtown Association Land Use and Livability Strategy, a copy of which was given to the CAC at its May meeting, is the result of seven years of work by the Urban Land Committee. The strategy includes a total of 13 recommendations, and for each the committee has added comments to make it clear what the strategies really mean and what the BDA wants to see accomplished. A printout of the additional comments was provided to the CAC members.

Mr. Walter Scott with the Legacy Corporation, 400 112th Avenue NE, said his company owns three parcels between NE 4th Street and NE 6th Street on the east side of 112th Avenue NE and the west side of I-405. He explained that he met with City officials nearly 12 years ago to discuss what should be done with the OLB zoning and was told that change moves slow to allow everyone to have their input and to understand any proposed change. The DT-OLB strip north of Main Street and south of NE 8th Street offers a unique opportunity. It is different from the Downtown proper, which for some reason stops at 112th Ave NE rather than I-405. The strip offers opportunities for diversity in terms of tenancy. He shared with the CAC an artist's rendering aimed at showing that density and height does not necessarily represent opaque walls and structures that block out all light. He stressed that the drawings were not to scale and did not represent a proposal for the Legacy Corporation properties. The Legacy properties could provide for some parking arrangements close to the freeway where access is easier than it is in the Downtown core, and they can do so at higher parking ratios by virtue of being grandfathered in.

Ms. Anita Skoog Neil, 9302 SE Shoreland Drive, pointed out that the email alert announcing the CAC meeting the City sent out on June 18 did not include a link; the recipients had to know where to look on the web to see what was coming up. She suggested the upcoming open house is premature given the poor notification to the

public. No notification at all has been sent to the neighborhoods about the Downtown Livability Initiative. She further suggested that the proposed schedule is very aggressive and not realistic. She said she would like to know how many of the downtown residential units are still unsold and are being rented out by the developers, and how many were intended to be rentals, an issue which affects the quality of life for surrounding neighborhoods. The focus group information was structured from least acceptable to the staff to the most acceptable to the staff. The biggest issue for residential areas is the wedding cake approach, and the neighborhoods do not want to see heights or densities changed at all. The guidelines for the protection of the neighborhoods as suggested are absolutely silly. To say that the perimeter district requirements penalize some property owners is absurd because those districts were created to protect property owners outside of the Downtown, and those who own properties in the perimeter districts knew what they were buying when they bought it. There should be a better understanding of why there is more residential than office in the Downtown. The concept of transfer of density (FAR) or fees in-lieu should be tossed out. Some of the incentives should become basic requirements, like underground parking. The larger tax base should not pay for infrastructure that is required due to the additional development; developers should pay their fair share. The City should be very careful about chasing bigger floor plates because the market has changed.

Ms. Laurie Lyford, 9529 Lake Washington Boulevard, read to the CAC an article published on May 1, 2012 which was authored by Wendell Cox which stated that the region's transportation and land use policies have little effect on traffic congestion. It went on to say that the Puget Sound region, which has some of the worst traffic congestion in the country, is making things worse by spending disproportionately on transit, which has minimal effect on getting people out of their cars. The Seattle region faces big challenges in the future. To the extent congestion interferes with job mobility, hindering the ability to take the best job available in the metropolitan area, economic and employment growth is reduced. Opportunities, especially for low-income job seekers, are diminished. While house prices are lower in coastal California, housing is still too costly and it has become harder for middle-income households to make ends meet. The keys to a prosperous future are transportation investments and land use policies that sustain and improve the standard of living, and not just for the well-paid professionals working in downtown Seattle, Bellevue and Redmond, but also for the hundreds of thousands of households for whom the region's higher cost of living is daunting. The reality is that neither present transportation plans nor land use policies are up to the challenge. Part of the problem can be traced to Washington State's Growth Management Act, a law that requires local jurisdictions to adopt long-range plans that supposedly ensure transportation infrastructure will be built to accommodate planned growth. The goal is good, but things are not turning out that way. In accord with the Puget Sound Regional Council's 2040 plan, local jurisdictions have assumed that an unrealistically large share of growth will occur in urban centers, while residential growth in outlying areas has been curtailed by urban growth boundaries. Just as gas prices rise when OPEC limits oil production, house prices rise when new development is prohibited in large swaths of land. The result is home prices relative to incomes that are 50 percent higher than before, an experience that is limited to metropolitan areas like Seattle with excessive land use

regulations. One principle purpose of growth management is to increase population densities, a witch's brew for traffic congestion in metropolitan areas that rely principally on cars. If the forecast for the Puget Sound Regional Council's 2040 transportation plans are accurate, Puget Sound area residents can look forward to much worse traffic congestion on regional arterials because of the disproportionate spending on transit, which ironically has minimal effect on reducing traffic congestion. It can be expected that increased spending on transit will offer minimal rewards. The state law aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions is ill conceived from the start. The fact is improved vehicle technology and cleaner fuels are far better ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions without materially reducing driving. Such misguided state requirements could drive businesses to locate in states without such burdensome regulations. What is missing is an objective and effective economic analysis. A less mobile metropolitan area will have less economic growth. The Puget Sound region could do much better.

4. REVIEW OF DRAFT ADVISORY COMMITTEE SCHEDULE AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Strategic Planning Manager Emil King reminded the committee that the staff on May 15 presented a preliminary schedule for CAC meetings and public engagement. The committee discussed the issues of meeting frequency and length, and asked the staff to think more about how to infuse in additional public engagement opportunities. He offered the members an updated draft meeting schedule which showed the committee continuing to meet the third Wednesday of each month, with the meetings varying in length. The schedule indicated no meetings in August, but included four open house/focus groups public engagement opportunities slated to coincide with every key milestone along the way.

Mr. King sought from the group approval of the draft schedule, allowing that it could be amended in the future as needed.

Ms. Stout suggested the timeline is too short and seeks to do too much too quickly. The result will be that people will be shut out from the process. The job cannot be done right in such a short timeframe.

Ms. Powell concurred. She said it appears there is a great deal of information to work through and try to understand. The materials presented to the committee members prior to the meeting was substantial.

Ms. Lopez said she had asked to have all materials provided sooner than one week in advance. She agreed that the amount of information provided was a great deal to read in less than a week. She further said she had asked that the *Neighborhood News* carry an article about the committee, not just a listing of the date and times the CAC will be meeting. A full article about the CAC and what it will be doing should be printed in the *Neighborhood News* if there is a desire to have the neighborhoods involved.

Mr. Sutherland agreed that establishing opportunities for the public to get involved is

very important.

Mr. Guenther stated that the amount of information to go through is great and the time in which to do it is small. He suggested that either the members should be given the information in smaller bites or well in advance of the meetings so it can be reviewed.

Mr. Chaplin concurred.

Mr. Bannon echoed the supreme need to have the information distributed broad and wide so all who are interested are fully informed. He said the CAC should be allowed to take all the time it needs to work through the issues without feeling rushed.

Mr. D'Amato agreed that the amount of material provided to the members was substantial. He pointed out that the mayor on May 15 stated that if the CAC needs more time, more time will be given. At the same time, it is good to have a deadline to work toward so the process will not drag on indefinitely. However, the CAC needs to be clear with regard to how deep it is expected to delve into each issue. If the committee is expected to work from the 30,000-foot level, the process will move along much more rapidly.

Mr. Helland said the CAC will need to prioritize issues and focus on them. If some issues do not get addressed and the Council wants them addressed, the schedule will need to be lengthened. He noted that the City has in the past engaged focus groups to work through issues and said he hoped any lessons learned would be applied going forward.

Ms. Maxwell said she favored going ahead with the draft schedule. She said should she reach a point where more information is needed, she would say so.

Mr. Ferris agreed that the amount of materials provided to the committee members was substantial. He indicated his preference to receiving the materials in printed format well ahead of meetings so he can mark them up and make side notes. Receiving materials via email is not preferred for that reason. He agreed the CAC needs to know what level to fly at in reviewing the issues, but pointed out that Planning Director Dan Stroh at the May 15 meeting made it clear that the group is expected to work at the detail level. Additionally, the advertisements relative to the focus groups have been somewhat exclusionary by targeting specific groups of people; they have not evoked an invitation for anyone from Bellevue to come and participate.

Co-chair Simas clarified that the modules to be introduced were intended to be viewed initially from the 10,000-foot level. The ground-level view will come at a later date. He allowed that neighborhood outreach is a critical element and methods for making sure information is shared and comments are generated will need to be further discussed. With regard to the calendar, he noted that it originally ended in November, has been extended to December, and will be readjusted as necessary as the process moves forward.

Co-chair Simas said he had asked staff to assume the committee members have read all

of the materials. He said it is generally unproductive for staff to spend meeting time reading materials previously submitted to the members.

Ms. Stout agreed with the comment made by Mr. Ferris regarding the need for the committee members to be provided with hard copies of materials well in advance of scheduled meetings.

Co-chair Laing concurred that no schedule will be set in stone. The committee is in the place of trying to respond to years of comments from stakeholders and the community asking the City to get on with the Downtown Livability issue, but it will be critical to move at a pace that will allow for getting things right the first time. He said he had heard from some stakeholders who said they could not possibly be ready to fully participate in the first focus group session given the volume of materials to read; some additional opportunities may need to be scheduled. He further commented that the email alerts include a link to follow that simply takes one to a page on the City's website that literally has every single planning initiative and project and it is necessary to scroll through to find the right document. Additionally, the web interface is a little difficult to navigate. Some means for allowing the public to offer comments online should be created in addition to inviting them to attend the meetings and otherwise get involved to allow for feedback throughout the entire process.

Mr. King said the City has the capability to receive web-based comments, and there is a dedicated Downtown Livability Initiative email. He agreed that some tweaks could be made to the public engagement process to improve the flow of information to and back from the public.

Co-chair Laing agreed with the need to prioritize the issues going forward, and with the need to make it clear what will be discussed at each meeting so stakeholders can be better informed.

5. DESIGN MODULES

Building Height and Form, Amenity Incentive System, Design Guidelines, Pedestrian Corridor and Public Open Spaces, Vision for DT-OLB District

Planning Director Dan Stroh explained that the audits involve a review of what the existing code says, how it has played out on the ground, what is working well, and where there may be room for improvement and new opportunities. They are a product of the staff and the consultant, but they were also informed by the public outreach that has occurred to date. The audits are still in draft form and are open to additional refinement as the process moves forward. In line with direction from the CAC, there will be some additional focus groups on the audits themselves.

Mr. Stroh said the code is a solid document that has over the years produced some great successes. The intent is to build on the existing code, not to construct a new code from the ground up. It should not be necessary to be an expert in order to provide meaningful input aimed at keeping the update on the right track.

Beginning with the amenity incentive system, also called the bonus system, Mr. Stroh said the key policy issue is how the system should be updated to meet evolving market conditions and integrate newer thinking about desired Downtown amenities. The existing code sets basic limits on Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and height for each Downtown district, and in order to move beyond the basic level developers must participate in the bonus system. The amount of bonus density or height that can be earned was originally calibrated by a ratio of the additional development value versus the cost of providing the amenity.

FAR is a relation of the building area to the land it sits on. Where there is 120,000 square feet of building area on a 30,000 square-foot property, the FAR is 4.0. There are some technical details relative to what is counted as building area, and there are certain exemptions, including ground floor retail. The FAR can be expressed in a number of different ways ranging from short buildings with similar floor plates to taller buildings with varied floor plates.

Mr. Stroh said not long ago most development in the Downtown was office and retail, and many wondered when residential development would begin to come online. In recent years, a large amount of new development coming online has been residential. The Downtown is the fastest growing residential neighborhood in the City and is currently home to some 10,000 residents.

Underground parking is a major incentive under the current system, and most new developments include underground parking. That has resulted in more open space and green amenities, which has made the Downtown more walkable. Pedestrian-oriented frontages are part of nearly every Downtown project, which has helped to build the public realm and sense of walkability and the amenity system has been a driver for that. Plazas and open spaces have been widely incorporated, and they also are incentivized. The Pedestrian Corridor is being developed incrementally, also as a result of the incentive system.

Mr. Stroh allowed that there is room for improvement. There are currently an estimated 800 children under the age of 18 living in the Downtown along with an active older population, so there is a need for more amenities serving all ages, including sports courts, p-patches and children's play areas. There is also the notion of incentivizing features that would make the Downtown more memorable. There are some livability features, such as weather protection, that are incentivized, but they have come online rather sporadically. The Great Streets work and the Downtown Design Charrette have brought to the forefront some ideas and innovations that have not yet been incorporated into the amenity incentive system. Some believe that green building techniques should be made part of the incentive system.

The amenity incentive system has a direct tie to development economics. Every new development that has come online has chosen to contribute some amenities. If changes are made to the incentive system, they must be made with an eye on making sure the

economics of development in the Downtown are not unsettled. The system has not, however, been calibrated in 30 years, so the economic relationship between the market value of bonus FAR and the cost of providing public amenities is unclear. There is some evidence that underground parking and residential uses likely would be developed with or without incentives. Some of the bonus features on the list are rarely if ever used. There is no provision in place that allows the incentive system to adapt over time.

Mr. Ferris pointed out that the issue of housing affordability in all areas of the City, including the Downtown, is not addressed in any of the materials. It is clear that housing affordability is key to making the Downtown inviting and friendly to families. Housing affordability needs to be an audit item and on the list of what has worked and has not worked.

Mr. Ferris noted that development goes through cycles. Up until 2001 everyone wondered when residential would be developed in the Downtown, and then there was a parade of condominiums that came online. Following the recession the only thing getting financed nationally was multifamily mixed use housing, so the uptick in residential units in the downtown is not necessarily the result of the City's land use policies or incentive plan. Job growth is happening now so the next cycle will include an increasing demand for office, and with a cap on how much high-end housing can be built in the Downtown, the housing market will likely stabilize. There does not appear to be a need to de-tune the housing incentives in the amenity system because the market will adjust on its own.

Mr. Helland noted that some things have come online regardless of the amenity incentive system and asked if it was market forces that drove them. If there are amenities on the list that are not having any effect, removing them would make sense. Mr. Stroh said there was a time when there was virtually no housing in the Downtown and when no one even talked about doing housing in the Downtown. That started to change in about 1996 when the first new housing development occurred on NE 12th Street. There has since been a generational change which makes urban centers very attractive as places to live. The residential incentives were critical in times past, but some would say market forces have overtaken the need for them. The same is true of underground parking. It is incredibly expensive to construct underground parking stalls and there was a time when the market, based on the land values and intensities, could not support the investment, but that has changed over time to the point where many developments include it without even claiming it as an amenity.

Ms. Maxwell commented that the perimeter districts and Old Bellevue have some redevelopment capacity within certain buildings and current floor plates that if done would not trigger the amenity for parking. She asked if the committee would be delving into the issue of public infrastructure, including publicly built parking. Mr. Stroh said some issues will undoubtedly be raised by the CAC that are not land use issues. Those topics may be called out as something the City should look at outside the work of the CAC. He agreed to put parking to meet the demands of existing buildings on that list.

Mr. Bannon agreed with the need to look at parking for existing buildings, particularly

those with retail uses. He asked how the value of amenities is determined. Mr. Stroh said the calibration was originally conceived and implemented in 1981 and included a residual land value analysis. The cost of building the amenity was easy to determine, and with both values in hand, it was possible to determine the ratio. The Downtown is not analogous to the Bel-Red corridor where there was a significant upzoning that created additional land value. Something unique to the Downtown will need to be identified, something that makes sense in the downtown environment and context.

Planning Manager Patti Wilma pointed out that all multifamily developments above a certain number of units located outside of the Downtown must provide play space. The requirement does not apply to the Downtown area.

Mr. Guenther stressed the need for flexibility and an approach that avoids just piling on more requirements.

Mr. D'Amato concurred. He said most developers have come to realize that development is organic pushed by many forces. The one thing that can be counted on is change. The Downtown as a place to live, work and play naturally invites residential development. Residential development brings with it a desire for special amenities, all of which keeps an area competitive over the long term.

Ms. Maxwell asked if the construction of a fire station in the Downtown could be brought about through payments in-lieu as part of the bonus amenity system. She said there currently is no fire station in the Downtown or one close to her neighborhood.

Ms. Stout said as the CAC works through the issues some consideration should be given to establishing values for amenities that enhance livability, both for the Downtown proper and the surrounding neighborhoods. The 800 children under the age of 18 living in the Downtown are the equivalent of two elementary schools, or a middle school, ~~and a half,~~ ~~and nearly a~~ or half of a high school, yet the school district does not have a seat at the table and what their plans are for the Downtown area as a neighborhood remain unknown.

****BREAK****

Mr. Stroh introduced consultants John Owen and Bob Bengford with Makers Architecture & Urban Design to discuss building height and form and design guidelines. Mr. Owen explained that building height and form has to do with how tall a building can be, how large the floor plates can be, and the FAR or density, all of which is the coarse ~~course~~-grain of building design. The design guidelines represent a much finer grain and a more flexible way of sculpting building shape. For each zone there is a basic height and bulk limit, and a maximum that can be achieved only through the amenity system. The so-called wedding cake principle is an approach that allows for the tallest buildings in the core of the Downtown and gradually diminishing heights toward the perimeter of the Downtown. Currently, building heights for residential structures tend to be somewhat higher. Conversely, the floor plate size allowed for residential is smaller. As a result,

residential towers tend to be taller but more slender than office buildings.

Bellevue's skyline is strong and dynamic with a lot of variety that evokes images of a large City. What it does not have, however, is the middle and outer layers of the wedding cake. Allowing additional height and incentives in those areas could trigger additional development to help fill out the pattern.

The spacing between buildings is important in that it has a direct correlation to views, shadow and light. The Code provisions in place are obviously working pretty well to achieve those goals, but to the extent some of the pattern has resulted from circumstance and the good sense of developers, some additional code direction would be in order, particularly with regard to orientation toward public parks, views or other amenities.

Mr. Owen stressed the need to respond to the market. In reviewing the Code and how it relates to the feasibility of constructing buildings, steps should be taken to avoid doing things like limiting floor plates in a way that would preclude certain desirable uses. The number of projects in the pipeline is evidence that the Code is working pretty well, but still there might be some things that ordinarily would be desirable.

The transition to adjacent single family neighborhoods is related to building height and form. The Downtown has a distinctive edge that makes it easy to note where the line is. Even so, there are conditions around the Downtown that are concerning to adjacent neighborhoods, and those things will need to be reviewed. In some areas it appears that the Downtown development actually turns its back on the adjacent neighborhoods with less than desirable results. New development could in fact make the perimeter more accessible and more desirable if done right. One possible new opportunity would be to allow for the transfer of FAR to further sculpt the overall skyline and development in the Downtown.

Mr. Ferris said it would be great to have an incentive that would result in an iconic feature that would really identify Bellevue. Such features usually end up with some height protections around it so they do not get buried. Overall the wedding cake approach for the Downtown is appropriate, though the DT- OLB district on the east side could support a lot more height up against the freeway. He also pointed out that floor plates for housing developments differ from those of office developments because of the requirements for residential to have light and air in every unit, so by Code and by demand residential demands smaller floor plates and to achieve the same FAR they have to go higher.

With regard to the issue of density transfer, Mr. Ferris said the practice could play out well in support of affordable housing. Someone wanting to build taller could buy the development rights from a shorter building.

Ms. Powell said she would like to see more open space in the Downtown. She said she lived for several years in Ballard which recently has seen a great deal of growth. Sadly, there is only about two acres of park land in the Ballard district, which is woefully

inadequate. As more families move into the Downtown, more places to play and recreate will be needed, and steps will need to be taken to ensure that land will be available.

Mr. Sutherland said from the perspective of an employer seeking to attract younger and more technical talent, a variety of amenities would make the Downtown more desirable. He agreed an iconic structure and green space would certainly have some appeal.

Mr. Guenther said he would support increasing building heights in the Downtown, particularly in the core area. It will also be important to look at increasing floor plate sizes for some of the downtown districts and allowing for flexibility in height. Equalizing the FAR between residential and non-residential should also be done.

Mr. Chaplin suggested that in thinking about higher buildings in the O-1 zone it will be necessary to look at which buildings would benefit from it. No one is going to tear down a 30-story office tower in order to build a 40-story office tower. The terrain of the Downtown also has to be taken into consideration relative to the wedding cake. Floor plate is a very technical issue when it comes to building structure, building height, and building economics. Changing the architectural form of buildings is easier to do with residential towers, particularly where the upper units are larger and have bigger decks. The top floors in non-residential buildings serve up the best rents so the building owner is going to want to maximize the upper floors to the extent allowed.

Mr. Bannon highlighted the need to optimize the Downtown as an attractive place to develop while generating the benefits the public wants, generating value for the City as a whole. Flexibility and a willingness to look at heights on a site-by-site basis in a way that will result in a better overall effect should be made part of the process.

Mr. D'Amato echoed the concern about the need to preserve open space in the Downtown. Clearly open space is a critical issue, one that no one worried about 25 years ago. The Downtown is filling in rapidly and unless something is done in the code all the space will soon be gone and the opportunity to create open space will be gone with it. Allowing property owners to go higher and have more density will be the only way to compensate them for the property used for open space.

With regard to the area of the Downtown fronting I-405, Ms. Jackson stressed the need to think about the visual communication with the rest of Bellevue. No effort should be spared in seeking to prevent the creation of a freeway tunnel walled in on both sides by tall buildings. She also commented that kids need art and art needs space. In Newport Hills there are buildings spaces that have been empty for a long time, but there are restrictions in place that keep them from being used for dance or art classes. There is a dance school in Downtown Bellevue that draws a lot of kids, but they will soon lose their space to another use and they have nowhere to go, yet developers say they cannot build a dance space in the Downtown. Art is far more than just a sculpture here and there, it involves teaching and creating as well, which requires space.

Mr. Helland noted the staff and consultants indicated some things appear to be working

well, but nothing has been said in support of how those conclusions were reached. Going forward there will need to be some data to back up those statements.

Ms. Maxwell agreed it would be good for Bellevue to have an iconic skyline but said there are different ways to accomplish that. Memorability has a lot to do with texture and experience on the ground. She said parks can be iconic, and it would be wonderful to have a linear park that circulates from the transportation hub around and through the Downtown. The Pedestrian Corridor alone is not sufficient. Bellevue is called a “city in a park”, and it would be iconic to have a linear park in the downtown.

Co-chair Simas commented that the Downtown is a neighborhood that happens to have a lot of businesses in it. Finding the balance between creating a great neighborhood and a strong business environment will be challenging.

Co-chair Laing referred to the table on page 6 of the materials indicating the achieved building heights. He noted that only two buildings are at 150 to 200 feet. That gap begs the question of why similar buildings are not being erected. Either it is not economical to build to that height or there is some other difficulty. With a base FAR of 0.5 in the Downtown, it appears that no development is feasible absent participating in the amenity system. If that is the case, it is not in fact an amenity system. If the base FAR is economically not viable, it should not be in the code.

With regard to the transfer of development rights, Co-chair Laing asked the CAC members to keep in mind that FAR and zoning is all just made up and is really nothing more than an exercise on paper. Thirty years down the road someone may decide that the open space created as the result of a transfer of development rights should in fact be developed with a structure. Rather than focusing on complicated issues such as moving density around, the focus should be on the overall goal.

The items on the amenity system chart appear to be the things the City planners 30 years ago wanted to see occur. The fact is, unless something makes economic sense, a developer will simply not do it. Some things, like weather protection, should simply be a requirement.

Mr. Bengford said he has lived in Bellevue for the past 16 years and loves to jog around the Downtown. The midblock connections have made it much easier to get around. With regard to the design guidelines, he said the key policy issue is livability and character. The existing Code has provisions applicable to the entire Downtown and some applicable in specific districts. The City’s design review process is different from the processes in other cities, many of which have design review boards.

Mr. Bengford commented that the Building/Sidewalk Relationship Guidelines are aimed at providing for a pedestrian-oriented environment. Every new project that has come online has improved the Downtown environment in one way or another. There is, however, room for improvement. The document is about 20 years old and the context has changed in the intervening years to the point where some tweaking is needed, particularly

to help shape ground floor frontages.

Clearly more weather protection elements are needed, and there are quite a few large blank walls, particularly in areas where there are grade changes. Some buildings lack detailing that can be brought about by varying materials, and in some areas there is a need for more window transparency. More sensitive treatment of utilities along frontages is also needed.

Some buildings have come online with interesting rooftop designs, and some have included green elements, but there is still room for improvement given that most buildings in the Downtown have rooftops designed to be utilitarian in screening equipment. As more people choose to live in the Downtown, there will be a greater interest in having more attractive rooftops, particularly on lower buildings which will be looked down on.

There is almost no guidance in the Code relative to building materials. There has been improvement over the years in the use of façade treatments, but some buildings still lack human scale details, and there is little in the code to guide the design.

With regard to pedestrian circulation, Mr. Bengford said there are several midblock connections that serve as excellent examples to build on. One thing to discuss would be ways to more successfully combine autos and pedestrians on some midblock corridors. Certain direction on good and bad design needs to be given. Midblock connections should be integrated into a larger and more functional system.

Bellevue has some excellent views that should be protected to the extent possible as development of the Downtown continues. The design guidelines do address the view issue, but more could be done.

Mr. Bengford said reinforcing the neighborhood character of the Downtown will be very important going forward. Old Bellevue has some specific standards that appear to be working well. Some of the Great Streets ideas are also playing out well, but there are areas that do not as yet have strong identifiable characters and some tweaks would be appropriate.

The Code does address the transition areas between the Downtown and the adjacent neighborhoods. The requirements for buildings to set back and for building height to step down toward the edges have worked well for the most part. Much of the development along the perimeter have created amenities the residents of the adjacent neighborhoods can walk to and use. The issue of permeability is more about making it easier for residents from outside the Downtown to walk into the Downtown, not about making the adjacent neighborhoods more permeable. There is no clear direction regarding what should be done with the edge along I-405 and the CAC should talk about that.

There was agreement to put off to a later meeting discussion of the remainder of the design modules as well as the connectivity and “other” modules.

Mr. Stroh noted that the upcoming open house and focus groups have been advertised but agreed some additional efforts could be made to make sure there will be a good representation by stakeholders as well as the general public.

Mr. D'Amato observed that the CAC is beginning to build up some momentum that could be somewhat lost if there is no meeting in August. He suggested that if there is to be no meeting that month, there should at least be some exercise assigned to the members to keep them focused on moving ahead. Co-chair Simas responded that the discussion at the July meeting on the remaining modules is bound to generate some more concerns and discussion. While nothing will be finalized, the staff could possibly send out in August an update to keep the CAC in the loop.

Ms. Lopez suggested that if possible the CAC should be given at the July meeting some specific points around which decisions will be made in September. That would help keep the momentum going. Co-chair Simas said it will be incumbent on the members to each review the list of amenities based on the feedback and comments made to date and determine which ones are valuable, which should be deleted, and what if any should be added to the list. There are also questions to be answered relative to building height and form as well as the design guidelines. By the end of the July meeting the CAC should have a pretty clear idea about the most popular ideas and be ready to tackle them in September.

Mr. Stroh suggested that for each module there is a range of different approaches that could be taken. Direction from the CAC will help frame the alternatives to be studied so the implications can be fully understood. He said the group will also be asked to identify some evaluation criteria to be used in determining which elements should be included in the analysis.

Co-chair Laing suggested the CAC members should at some point take the time to review the existing Code before identifying potential changes to it.

6. CONNECTIVITY MODULES

Light Rail Interface/Station Area Planning, Downtown Parking

This item was held over to a future meeting.

7. OTHER MODULES

Mechanical Equipment Screening, Vacant Sites and Buildings, Recycling and Solid Waste, Vendor Carts/Mobile Food Trucks, Permitted Uses

This item was held over to a future meeting.

8. PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Anita Skoog Neil, 9302 SE Shoreland Drive, told the CAC members they are doing a

good job.

Mr. Stu Vander Hoek, 9 103rd Avenue NE, suggested a larger meeting room should be found for the CAC meetings. He referred to the bonus points assigned to items in the amenity incentive system and suggested one reason certain things are not being brought online may be that the points need to be reassessed and revalued. Particularly in the perimeter area, developments that bump up against height limits will have no incentive to include amenities from the list. The International Building Code and fire and life/safety requirements that kick in at certain heights may be the reason so few buildings in the 150- to 200-foot range have been constructed. He noted his support for the work of the CAC and said it is on the right track. The focus group sessions scheduled for the 27th and the 28th should be delayed as it is simply too early in the process. The CAC spent two hours talking about process, something that should have been determined in advance.

9. ADJOURN

Co-chair Laing adjourned the meeting at 9:43 p.m.